

WTAMU Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes¹

August 29, 2025

Attended: Fisseha Alemayehu, Brandon Bang, Kristy Bartlett, Bradley Behrmann, Ryan Brooks, Leon Chen, Li Chen, Maxine De Butte, Traci Fredman, David Howe, Stephen Karaganis, Turkan Kilic, Marty Kuhlman, Audrey Meador, Shanna Peeples, Laura Reyher, Jim Rogers, Brandli Stitzel, William Takacs, Shiquan Tao, Vinu Unnikrishnan

Proxy: Qi Kang for Bridget Guerrero, Gene Farren for Lee Doernste, Sanjoy Bhattacharia for Anirban Pal

Absent: Chelsea Kuehler

President Brandon Bang called the regular meeting of the West Texas A&M Faculty Senate on August 29, 2025, to order at 12:15 p.m. in JBK 33 (West Texas Room).

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

The minutes for the regular meeting on May 9, 2025, were reviewed. Li Chen updated the list of meeting attendees and absent individuals on the draft. Ryan Brooks moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and passed.

Officers' Reports and Remarks

President

- **Ombuds:**
 - The Ombuds Officer has not been used a lot on campus. From January to June 2025, the current ombuds officer, David Rausch, met with only one individual. Flyers should be posted campus-wide to let more people know about the ombuds.
 - Need a new ombuds officer at the end of this academic year. If senators have someone in mind, feel free to ask them about it and encourage them to apply.
- Planning to attend the TAMUS Assembly of Faculty Senates and Texas Council of Faculty Senates over the next three weeks. Hope to learn about how other institutions cope with SB 37.
- Attended an evidentiary hearing for a grievance case in July.

¹ Please see attachment below concerning approval of the meeting minutes.

- Merit: Had conversations with multiple faculty members, Deans, Department Heads, as well as Dr. Terry, to try to understand how merit in the current cycle worked.
 - As best as can be ascertained, merit worked this way: each faculty member received a 1.5% raise, and then department heads were asked to rank their faculty members. The top 50% received additional merit. In some colleges, each of the top 50% performers received another 1.5% and some colleges did differently.
 - The *Faculty Handbook* provides a detailed explanation of how merit is evaluated, but according to several people, Dr. Wendler voided this part of the Handbook around the first of July.
 - Some senators expressed concerns about not following the *Faculty Handbook* when calculating merit. One senator mentioned a recent handbook update on this issue, but few people know about it. Another senator mentioned that through SACSCOC, Dr. Wendler has the deciding power over most university business, including merit.
 - Brandon Bang said he will follow up on the *Faculty Handbook* change.
 - Some senators expressed concerns about the “ranking” and merit calculation processes not being transparent.
- Required training: Faculty members are expected to complete this training on time; otherwise, they may be denied a merit-based salary increase, as per the directive from HR. Dr. Wendler and Dr. Terry are open to suggestions from faculty on how to ensure faculty members complete required training on time instead of denying merit.
 - One senator asked about the mechanism of knowing whether or not one faculty member has completed training: is it automatically flagged by the system, or do supervisors check them manually?
 - Another senator mentioned that faculty members can change the training due dates in the system.
 - One senator and Brandon Bang suggested that the reminders should be better scheduled (e.g., not three months ahead of the due dates).
- Faculty evaluations of administrators: suggested that Jarvis send links directly to individuals, rather than asking administrators to re-distribute them. Dr. Terry did not think this was a good idea. However, Dr. Terry did email all the Deans and let them know that there is an expectation that they should distribute the faculty evaluations of administrators unless there are exceptional circumstances not to.

President-Elect

No new business to report.

Secretary

JBK 33 has been booked for another event on Sept. 12. The meeting on Sept. 12 will be moved to JBK 16.

Committees

Faculty Handbook

(Tabled)

Joint Faculty/Student Committee on Academic Affairs

(Tabled)

Unfinished Business

- Two vacancies on the Student Handbook Committee (2025-2028)
 - a. Faculty senators voted. The two who received the most votes were elected: Echo Sibley and Carla Eichler will serve on the Student Handbook Committee.

New Business

- SB 2615 about restricting telework
 - a. Brandon Bang talked to Dr. Terry over the summer. What he learned from Dr. Terry is that SB 2615 should not affect most faculty members.
 - b. Brandon Bang believed that there were only a handful of faculty members who work remotely, and this legislation could potentially influence them, but much remains unknown. So most people can carry on as usual.
 - c. One senator asked about the definition of “working remotely”: fully online or just being away from campus?
- SB 37
 - a. Brandon Bang received a new message from the TAMU system this morning concerning a new policy approved by the Board of Regents. The new policy issued by the TAMU Board of Regents stipulates System schools must establish a new “Faculty Advisory Council” that must follow the mandates as outlined in SB 37.
 - b. Therefore, **on September 1, 2025, the current Faculty Senate is legally dissolved.**
 - c. More details about the Faculty Advisory Council will need to be figured out over the next few months. On the advice of Dr. Terry, Brandon Bang suggested that senators from each college conduct a representative election within the senate and elect one individual to serve on a transitional Faculty Advisory Council (i.e., “elected”), and to serve on the new Faculty Advisory Council as well. Another person to be the 2nd representative to be recommended to Dr. Wendler and seek his approval (i.e., “recommended and appointed”). All faculty members on the new Faculty Advisory Council must be tenured according to SB37. Ideally, they should also currently serve as faculty senators. In this way, about 50% of the current Faculty Senate body can be kept. Senators agreed on the ways of selecting members of the Faculty Advisory Council.

- i. One senator expressed concerns about associate professors serving on the Faculty Advisory Council. They recommended full professors to serve on the new committee.
- ii. Li Chen asked why only 12 people are needed at this point; per SB 37, there could be more people on the Faculty Advisory Council. Brandon Bang said the committee is transitional, and the exact number of committee members will be decided later. Other organizations will likely have representation (library, graduate school), but 12 is a good number to start with.
- iii. Another senator introduced the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). With AAUP's efforts over the past few months, several provisions in the original version of SB 37 have been removed. They suggested that, now that the Faculty Senate is dissolved, hopefully more faculty members will join the AAUP and its WT chapter.

Senators entered breakout sessions by college to discuss and elect committee members on the transitional Faculty Advisory Council from each college at 1:20 pm.

Senators ended the breakout sessions and returned to the big group meeting at 1:32 pm.

- Piper Professor application and nominations
 - a. Few people were aware of the details regarding the application process. Brandon Bang will ask Amy Andersen for more information. It will be discussed with the 6 members (i.e., elected members) on the committee on Sept. 12.

Preliminary decisions on members of the Faculty Advisory Council:

ESS: Brandon Bang (Elected), Maxine De Butte (suggested for appointment)

FAH: Li Chen (Elected), Ryan Brooks (suggested for appointment)

COE: Audrey Meador (Elected), Kenneth Leitch (suggested for appointment)

ANS: Bridget Guerrero (Elected), the other slot was deferred

NHS: Deferred

COB: Deferred

COB, ANS, and NHS representatives will meet with senior faculty members in their respective colleges to identify potential Faculty Advisory Council members. They will send the names to Brandon Bang, and then Brandon Bang will send the names to Dr. Wendler.

Upcoming

- Brandon Bang will send all faculty an email about Faculty Senate and the transition to Faculty Advisory Council in the next few weeks.

Other

- Maxine De Butte commended the executive committee for service to Faculty Senate, which was met with applause from attendees.
- Li Chen commended Brandon Bang for his leadership in seeking a future approach to preserving faculty voices and making the transitions, which was met with applause from attendees.

Adjournment

Maxine De Butte moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by multiple senators. The meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully,

Li Chen, Secretary
August 31, 2025

September 4, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

Due to the passage of Senate Bill 37 (Texas Education Code § 51.3522), the Faculty Senate at West Texas A&M University was legally dissolved effective September 1, 2025. As a result, there is no Faculty Senate to approve the meeting minutes from the August 29, 2025 meeting. However, the Executive Committee — Dr. Brandon L. Bang (President), Dr. Audrey Meador (President-Elect), and Dr. Li Chen (Secretary) — has reviewed these minutes and affirms that they are correct and accurate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brandon L. Bang", is written over a light yellow rectangular background.

Brandon L. Bang, Ph.D.
President, Faculty Senate
West Texas A&M University